

Re: H.B. 5886

February 10, 2015

The Honorable Senator Catherine A. Osten
Co-Chair, Planning and Development Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 2100
Hartford, CT 06106

The Honorable Representative Philip J. Miller
Co-Chair, Planning and Development Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 4011
Hartford, CT 06106

Members of the Planning and Development Committee of the Connecticut General
Assembly

Re: H.B. 5886 *AN ACT PROHIBITING MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES FROM SERVING
ON CERTAIN MUNICIPAL LEGISLATIVE BODIES*

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Miller, and distinguished members of the Planning
and Development Committee:

Thank you for your dedicated service to our state, its 169 municipalities, and its 3.6-
million residents.

The bill before you is of great importance to all citizens of Connecticut. The will of the
people, as officially recorded by local elections, should not be circumvented by local
officials based on a contrived application of state law. In the case of my city, Bridgeport,
the people approved a charter that bans city employees from serving on the City Council.
And yet, currently, thanks to the legal guidance of City Attorney, Mark Anastasi -- who

serves at the pleasure of Mayor Bill Finch -- four city employees serve on the City Council. By approving House Bill 5886 as is, you'll help end this violation of our city charter and bring Bridgeport up to commonly held governance standards.

Let's not forget that it's state tax dollars that keep Bridgeport afloat. Our state has a vested interest in seeing that its substantial investments in Bridgeport are made in concordance with a Bridgeport city government that should consciously and humbly adhere to accepted standards and practices, including governmental checks and balances. It is the least that Bridgeport should do, when it is utterly dependent on the state.

The Bridgeport city charter -- as approved by Bridgeport voters -- prohibits Bridgeport city employees from serving on the Bridgeport City Council and voting on the city budget. Incredibly, there is no independent finance committee responsible to the taxpayer in Bridgeport. Such responsibilities are rolled into the City Council. However, from what I've seen, the Council performs little or no due diligence, no research and analysis, no monitoring, and provides virtually no oversight or "check" on the Mayor's budgets. In effect, the City Council is a rubber stamp for the mayor's budget. Equally troubling is the fact that while the voter-approved city charter calls for an annual independent capital hearing, the city fails to conduct one. At the City Council's Budget and Appropriations Committee meetings, the chair capriciously prohibits input or questions from long-standing, law-abiding taxpayers. At the completion of a recent Budget and Appropriations Committee meeting, the City's Finance Director, when asked a respectful question by a long-time Bridgeport taxpayer, was heard to respond, "I choose not to answer questions."

If all that were not bad enough, based on the legal judgment of the Bridgeport City Attorney, the 20-member City Council includes these four city employees: Tom McCarthy, James Holloway, Milta Feliciano, and Richard Paoletto, Jr. Council President Tom McCarthy is employed as Deputy Director of Labor Relations for the City of Bridgeport. Holloway is a permit supervisor for the city. Feliciano is Director of Veterans

Affairs. Paoletto is Acting Deputy Director of Housing and Commercial Code Enforcement for Bridgeport.

According to the *Connecticut Post* ("City Councilman Paoletto faces harassment accusation" by Brian Lockhart, Oct 27, 2014), Mr. Paoletto was placed on paid leave last October for alleged sexual harassment of a college intern – the 2nd such allegation against him in the past 5 years. This workplace incident is being investigated by Labor Relations Director Larry Osborne -- Tom McCarthy's boss. As of today, the matter remains under review, and Mr. Paoletto continues to earn his pay while on leave and to hold his position on the Council. This is *just one recent example* of many unseemly and costly things that occur in our city government due to a lack of checks and balances. And who's disentangling these crossed and conflicting lines of interest? Who's watching out for the greater good? The City Attorney? The City Attorney serves at the pleasure of the mayor while providing legal counsel to the City Council – showing us yet another blatant conflict. I hope that U.S. Attorney, Deirdre Daly, and the newly established Connecticut Public Corruption Task Force will shine a light on Bridgeport city government very soon.

It's impossible for taxpayers to get a fair deal when the head of the city's legislative branch works at the pleasure of the executive branch with no checks and balances. This would be illegal in our state and federal government. But in Bridgeport it's permitted because the City Attorney has cited state law as a pretext to violating home rule.

Such conflict-of-interest is so fundamentally wrong because it serves the interests of a few at the cost of the many – here in Bridgeport and across the state. Who benefits from such obscurantism? I don't. I'm betting you don't either. Surely, your constituents don't, and some of their tax dollars go to supporting Bridgeport. We will continue to pour tax dollars into this substandard system of government for years to come, unless something is done in this legislative session, starting with you.

Re: H.B. 5886

My fellow Bridgeport residents and your colleagues in the Connecticut General Assembly, State Representative Jack Hennessy and State Senator Marilyn Moore, understand first-hand the dire need for this bill. Please hear them out. They know that this countermeasure against blatant conflict-of-interest will help propel Bridgeport toward a more open, accountable, and transparent city government. Now is the time for this sensible bill. Its passage will greatly help the great majority of us in our city and in our state.

I hope you will support H.B. 5886 as it is. Thank you.

Peter D. Spain, MPH
280 Grovers Ave
Bridgeport, CT
06605